

**IN THE IOWA ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS DIVISION
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

DARIO MORTON
Claimant

APPEAL 24A-UI-00872-PT-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

HEARTLAND EXPRESS INC OF IOWA
Employer

**OC: 12/17/23
Claimant: Appellant (1)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant, Dario Morton, filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated January 12, 2024, (reference 02) that held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on February 12, 2024. The claimant participated personally. The employer, Heartland Express Inc. of Iowa, participated through Human Resources Representative Trish Rummelhart. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative record.

ISSUE:

Whether the claimant was discharged for disqualifying, job-related misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: The claimant last worked for the employer on November 10, 2023. The employer discharged claimant on December 15, 2023, because the claimant's commercial driver's licenses (CDL) expired and he was no longer able to perform the duties of his position under Iowa law.

The claimant was employed as a full-time over-the-road truck driver from December 11, 2019, until his employment with Heartland Express Inc. of Iowa ended on December 15, 2023. As an over-the-road truck driver, the claimant was responsible for picking up loads of products and delivering those products to various locations. The claimant's job duties involved substantial daily driving in a company semi-truck. One of the employer's policies requires all truck drivers to maintain a valid, unencumbered commercial driver's license. The claimant was aware of the employer's work rules and policies and he knew that failing to maintain his license would result in termination of his employment.

On November 13, 2023, the claimant's commercial driver's licenses expired. Prior to that date, the claimant had been in contact with the Department of Motor Vehicles to renew his license. However, in order to do so, the claimant was required to provide a copy of his birth certificate, but the claimant was unable to obtain a copy. The claimant informed the employer of the situation with his CDL and the employer agreed to give claimant an additional 30 days to renew

his CDL. During the 30 day period, the claimant worked hard to try to get a copy of his birth certificate, but he was unable to obtain a copy. On December 15, 2023, the employer notified the claimant that it was no longer able to hold his position open and that his employment was being terminated until the claimant could get his CDL renewed and could legally perform the duties of his position under Iowa law.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment due to disqualifying, job-related misconduct. Benefits are denied.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

2. *Discharge for misconduct.* If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

a. The individual shall be disqualified for benefits until the individual has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the individual's weekly benefit amount, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)d(14) provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits:

2. Discharge for misconduct. If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

d. For the purposes of this subsection, "*misconduct*" means a deliberate act or omission by an employee that constitutes a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of the employee's contract of employment. Misconduct is limited to conduct evincing such willful or wanton disregard of an employer's interest as is found in deliberate violation or disregard of standards of behavior which the employer has the right to expect of employees, or in carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design, or to show an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests or of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. Misconduct by an individual includes but is not limited to all of the following:

(11) Failure to maintain any licenses, registration, or certification that is reasonably required by the employer or by law, or that is a functional requirement to perform the individual's regular job duties, unless the failure is not within the control of the individual.

The employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). Misconduct serious enough to warrant

discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be “substantial.” *Newman v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. *Lee v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000).

The employer terminated the claimant’s employment because the claimant failed to maintain his commercial driver’s licenses, a known condition of his employment. Repeated traffic violations rendering a claimant uninsurable can constitute job misconduct even if the traffic citations were received on the claimant’s own time and in his own vehicle. *Cook v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 299 N.W.2d 698 (Iowa 1980). The employer is not obligated to accommodate the claimant during a license suspension or revocation period, but does have a legal obligation to abide by state and federal transportation safety statutes and regulations and not allow unlicensed individuals to drive. While the license expiration issue was not related to claimant’s work, claimant’s failure to maintain a valid, unrestricted commercial driver’s license as a known condition of the employment was misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of benefits.

DECISION:

The January 12, 2024, (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged on December 15, 2023, for disqualifying, job-related misconduct. Unemployment insurance benefits shall be withheld until the claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times claimant’s weekly benefit amount, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.



Patrick B. Thomas
Administrative Law Judge

February 20, 2024
Decision Dated and Mailed

pbt/scn

APPEAL RIGHTS. If you disagree with the decision, you or any interested party may:

1. Appeal to the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days of the date under the judge's signature by submitting a written appeal via mail, fax, or online to:

**Iowa Employment Appeal Board
6200 Park Avenue Suite 100
Des Moines, Iowa 50321
Fax: (515)281-7191
Online: eab.iowa.gov**

The appeal period will be extended to the next business day if the last day to appeal falls on a weekend or a legal holiday.

AN APPEAL TO THE BOARD SHALL STATE CLEARLY:

- 1) The name, address, and social security number of the claimant.
- 2) A reference to the decision from which the appeal is taken.
- 3) That an appeal from such decision is being made and such appeal is signed.
- 4) The grounds upon which such appeal is based.

An Employment Appeal Board decision is final agency action. If a party disagrees with the Employment Appeal Board decision, they may then file a petition for judicial review in district court.

2. If no one files an appeal of the judge's decision with the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days, the decision becomes final agency action, and you have the option to file a petition for judicial review in District Court within thirty (30) days after the decision becomes final. Additional information on how to file a petition can be found at Iowa Code §17A.19, which is online at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf> or by contacting the District Court Clerk of Court <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

Note to Parties: YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in the appeal or obtain a lawyer or other interested party to do so provided there is no expense to Workforce Development. If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, you may obtain the services of either a private attorney or one whose services are paid for with public funds.

Note to Claimant: It is important that you file your weekly claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

SERVICE INFORMATION:

A true and correct copy of this decision was mailed to each of the parties listed.

DERECHOS DE APELACIÓN. Si no está de acuerdo con la decisión, usted o cualquier parte interesada puede:

1. Apelar a la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo dentro de los quince (15) días de la fecha bajo la firma del juez presentando una apelación por escrito por correo, fax o en línea a:

**Iowa Employment Appeal Board
6200 Park Avenue Suite 100
Des Moines, Iowa 50321
Fax: (515)281-7191
En línea: eab.iowa.gov**

El período de apelación se extenderá hasta el siguiente día hábil si el último día para apelar cae en fin de semana o día feriado legal.

UNA APELACIÓN A LA JUNTA DEBE ESTABLECER CLARAMENTE:

- 1) El nombre, dirección y número de seguro social del reclamante.
- 2) Una referencia a la decisión de la que se toma la apelación.
- 3) Que se interponga recurso de apelación contra tal decisión y se firme dicho recurso.
- 4) Los fundamentos en que se funda dicho recurso.

Una decisión de la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo es una acción final de la agencia. Si una de las partes no está de acuerdo con la decisión de la Junta de Apelación de Empleo, puede presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el tribunal de distrito.

2. Si nadie presenta una apelación de la decisión del juez ante la Junta de Apelaciones Laborales dentro de los quince (15) días, la decisión se convierte en acción final de la agencia y usted tiene la opción de presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el Tribunal de Distrito dentro de los treinta (30) días después de que la decisión adquiriera firmeza. Puede encontrar información adicional sobre cómo presentar una petición en el Código de Iowa §17A.19, que se encuentra en línea en <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf> o comunicándose con el Tribunal de Distrito Secretario del tribunal <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

Nota para las partes: USTED PUEDE REPRESENTARSE en la apelación u obtener un abogado u otra parte interesada para que lo haga, siempre que no haya gastos para Workforce Development. Si desea ser representado por un abogado, puede obtener los servicios de un abogado privado o uno cuyos servicios se paguen con fondos públicos.

Nota para el reclamante: es importante que presente su reclamo semanal según las instrucciones, mientras esta apelación está pendiente, para proteger su derecho continuo a los beneficios.

SERVICIO DE INFORMACIÓN:

Se envió por correo una copia fiel y correcta de esta decisión a cada una de las partes enumeradas.